

By Suzanne Perry, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*

Nonprofit leaders and experts gathered on Capitol Hill today to praise newly unveiled legislation that aims to raise the profile of the charitable world in Washington.

"We have a government that counts iceberg-lettuce heads and can tell us how many iceberg-lettuce heads were put on the ground last year," Tim Delaney, president of the National Council of Nonprofits, said at a press conference. "Yet it cannot tell us how many heads of individuals were employed by nonprofits. Why are iceberg-lettuce heads more valuable than the people who take care of America's communities?"

The new bill, the Nonprofit Sector and Community Solutions Act, H.R. 5533, was introduced Tuesday evening by Rep. Betty McCollum, Democrat of Minnesota. It would create two new bodies to make recommendations about federal policy affecting charities and require federal agencies to step up their collection of data about such organizations. (See yesterday's Chronicle report for more details about the legislation.)

Noting that nonprofit employees make up 10 percent of the American work force, Ms. McCollum complained at the press conference that no Congressional committee or federal agency exists to help nonprofit groups succeed -- for example, nothing along the lines of the Small Business Administration, which helps for-profit groups.

She called her bill the "first step toward creating a more effective partnership between the federal government and the nonprofit sector."

Representing academic researchers, Alan Abramson, a professor of government and politics at George Mason University, said data about the nonprofit world is "woeful" and slow to trickle out. "The sector could fall off the earth and we wouldn't know about it for two years," he said.

Other speakers at the press conference included Diana Aviv, president of Independent Sector, the coalition of charities and foundations; Marcia Avner, public policy director at the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits; Ford W. Bell, president of the American Association of Museums; and Shirley Sagawa, a consultant who spoke on behalf of America Forward, a coalition of more than

70 nonprofit groups.

Ms. McCollum's legislation has been referred to three House committees: oversight and government reform, education and labor, and science technology. She is now working to line up a Republican co-author and Democratic co-sponsors.

*Sheila Kumar and Lisa Marrs contributed to this article.*